

INT. BACKSTAGE AT DAILY GRIND OPEN MIC - NIGHT

Opening titles come and go over black while a performance from a singer/songwriter plays beautifully.

Playing quickly fades into a muffled tone as a visibly nervous man, James CHELERE (Shell-a-ray), a late-20s/early 30s, stands in the shadow of the curtain waiting to go on stage. He continues to wipe away the sweat beads as they form on his forehead.

James peeks from behind the curtain. This bar isn't crowded, but his reaction is that he's the opening act at Madison Square Garden. His cheeks puff as he breathes. Faster. Deeper. He looks away and turns to the pleasing green glow of the exit sign. SUDDEN APPLAUSE snaps his head back to look at the stage. The announcer, BARRY, 40s, a rotund happy guy, steps past James and approaches the mic as the performer steps off stage and into the audience.

BARRY

Give him a hand. Craig August, everyone. Next up we have one of our regulars, Curt Capelle.

A handsome, fit, confident man, CURT CAPELLE, late-20s/early 30s, startles James again as he walks by. Curt gives Barry a hug, then sits center stage. Barry exits the stage and walks past James.

CURT

Thanks Barry. Hi everyone, Craig is joining me for this one. How are you folks doing? (Woo/Applause) [continued rambling] I've been listening to a lot of classics including...

Focus stays on James. As rambling continues, Curt's voice muffles and fades. James sees Curt's effect: The audience enjoying his presence. Laughter. Clapping. This BREAKS as someone puts a hand on James's arm. He jolts, then turns around to see Barry.

Barry

James Chu-ler-ree, right?

James shakes his head, "Yes".

James

Chelere.

Barry

Right. You're up next. Stick around this time, okay?

James gives a nervous nod, then looks up to the green exit sign behind Barry. Barry releases his hand from James's arm, then follows up with a reassuring pat. James looks back out on stage.

James

(whispering to himself)

...stick around, stick around...

Any sort of confidence James had drains from his face as Curt continues to sing.

James (CONT'D)

(whisper/singing)

...stick around, stick....

As Curt finishes out his song, it's followed by roaring applause over a steel door opening, then squeaking to close. James is gone.

CURT

Thanks for coming out everyone. (motion to Craig) Craig August everyone. I'm Curt Capelle. See you next time.

Barry

Give it up for Curt, everybody! As always, a pleasure Curt.

ext. City Streets - same night

James, with a guitar case on his back, makes the long walk from the left side of the frame, to the right side, in a large wide shot. SHOW TITLE: COVER BAND. The audio over this clip is the announcer mixed with James:

Barry

Next up we have James Chu-ler-ree. (beat) James, are you back there? Well folks, he got us again. In the meantime, how about another applause for Curt!

James

(whisper/singing)

...stick around, stick around...

int. James'S apartment - same night

You would expect this apartment complex to have been built in the 1970s. Perhaps parts were upgraded in the 1980s, but nothing since then. It's nice enough with average landscaping.

Just outside of his apartment, James aggressively fumbles with his keys.

James

(whisper/singing)

...why don't you stick around...

He opens the door with frustration, but after a deep breath, closes it softly - mindful of his neighbors. Still frustrated, he continues to sing to himself.

He turns on the lights. Walls are covered in notebook paper containing a lovely mix of art, poems, and song lyrics. These lyric sheets are truly art. He ignores it all as if it were beige paint on drywall.

James (CONT'D)

(whisper/singing)

...stick around, stick around...

He puts down his guitar case on a floor stand then sits on the edge of his mattress/boxspring combo and hangs his head between his arms. The singing stops. A moment later, he gets up and grabs a large, five subject college ruled notebook from a stack of them on his bookshelf. He tosses it on the bed, then immediately unsheathes his guitar. He plops back down on the bed and takes a short moment - a quiet before the storm. He begins to strum a tune that comes with ease. The lyrics include "Stick Around". The music carries over to the next scene.

EXT. neighborhood streets - day

It's a new early morning. The sun has just peeked over the horizon, and a helmeted James is on his bike with a bag of papers tossing them at doors and doing the occasional hand off to anyone waiting for him to come by. One by one, papers make their way to their rightful owners. What was once a full crate of papers on his bike, now only contains one. He finally slows his bike down, arriving at an average trailer home with a porch.

EXT. SAM's Rental Trailer - same DAY

He leans his bike on the trailer, puts his helmet on it, then grabs that last paper. He hops up the three steps, onto the porch, opens the screen door, knocks. Almost instantly, SAM, mid/late 30s, tired, lean man in a robe, tank top, and pajama pants opens the door. He hasn't shaved in a while, but it seems to be the look he wants to go for.

James

Good morning. Your paper, sir.

James pushes the newspaper into Sam's chest, giving him no choice but to take it.

SAM

Come on, no one reads these.

James walks past Sam and into the home.

INT. SAM'S TRAILER - SAME DAY

Sam's home is a typical trailer, complete with wood paneling and carpet. It's a bit messy, but can still be navigated.

James

Its the only perk I have that I can share with you Sam, so take it. You've never complained before.

SAM

I'm just trying to save you the trouble. I get my news from the internet, like everyone else.

James immediately sits on the couch as Sam trashes the paper. Sam sits in a chair and retrieves his coffee nearby.

sam (CONT'D)

You're good for more than just papers. Why don't you get a different job that you're too old for - like opening up a lemonade stand? I could use that.

James

I'm done for the day, and you'll be changing oil til the sun goes down.

SAM

I wouldn't know what to do with all of that spare time. Ya want breakfast?

James

Yeah.

On the table next to Sam's coffee, James observes a sobriety chip on the table. "9 months sober". Sam begins to prepare a simple breakfast in the kitchen. The two rooms are only divided by a bar, allowing face to face conversation. Sam begins to undo the bread bag.

SAM

While your job's still viable, you can use the car whenever you want. You know, get off of that bike. I barely use it, so no questions asked.

Sam loads the toaster with two whites as James handles the coin.

James

No Sam, gas, its wasteful - I mean, being green, yeah, but more importantly - there goes a quarter of

my earnings in a day.

SAM

How the hell do you afford rent with a job like that?

James

Cheap rent. I got lucky.

SAM

Lucky. You better not be spending any of that inheritance. Learn from me. Fuck. If I had that money back, things would be different. Wouldn't be in this shit hole, you know?

James is uncomfortable with the subject.

James

Speaking of being green...

James gets up, takes the newspaper out from the trash and places it onto the counter. Sam scoops out a piece of coffee cake.

SAM

Come on, you're gonna get coffee grinds all over the place. I don't need these damn things. I walk to work - how's that for a contribution to Mother Earth?

James returns to his seat. The toaster pops as Sam returns the newspaper to the trash. Sam places the toast on the small plate next to the coffee cake.

James

I'm not hugging trees or anything - I just think its not a bad idea.

Sam opens up the refrigerator.

SAM

You want jelly or butter?

James

Do you have jam? Or preserves?

SAM

What's the difference?

James

Between jam and preserves; or either of those to jelly?

The refrigerator seems to hums loudly as Sam gives a blank stare awaiting any answer. James drops the chip on the table, then grabs his own sweaty shirt; looks down at it.

James

Butter's fine. I guess I've earned it.

Sam closes the refrigerator and begins to apply the butter.

Sam

Mom's been asking me to send her a video of you at one of your concerts. If I knew where it was, I probably would have went.

James

When I'm ready, I'll tell you where I'll be. But... they didn't put me on again.

sam

What happened this time?

James

They just ran out of space for me, that's all.

Sam has hear it before. After buttering the bread, he adds it to the plate with the coffee cake, then brings it to James. Sam sits back down, by his own coffee and sobriety chip. He picks up the chip and begins to play with it, running it over his fingers.

sam

She wants to see you in the spotlight again.

James

I never really was in the spotlight.

SAM

She's referring to the recitals and performances when we were kids. That shit counts.

James

She doesn't want to come see for herself?

SAM

You won't tell us where you are. She's not going to spend over an hour on the road for nothing.

James

She gets her nails done like twenty minutes from here.

SAM

She can make appointments for that.

James shakes his head, confused. Sam leans in, carefully speaking.

SAM (CONT'D)

She doesn't want to make the drive unless she knows you're gonna go through with it. So you got a little stage fright. Hell, everyone's got it to some degree. I couldn't do it.

James

I told you, they didn't put me on, so it doesn't matter.

SAM

Then tell me where it'll be so I can tell the management off. If you don't want me there, don't even tell me you're playing.

James

Yeah, sure.

Sam sits back in his chair.

James (CONT'D)

New chip. How does it feel?

Sam tosses it at James.

SAM

You wouldn't think something so small would be so damn important.

James

You've got something to prove.

SAM

Yeah. I ain't going down that road again, though. It scares me to think about it.

James

Yeah.

James tosses chip back at Sam. He catches it.

James (CONT'd)

Don't think about it.

EXT. streets Near James's apartment - same day

James, on bike, makes his way back to his own apartment.

ext. Just outside of James's apartment - same day

James parks his bike and proceeds to lock it to the stair's railing. While messing with the lock, Curt Capelle walks by holding a box and a duffel bag on his shoulder. He gives James the "cool guy nod". James is quick to return one of his own (which doesn't come off nearly as cool), followed by a look of curiosity.

INT. James'S APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James sits bedside with legs crossed. His guitar sits beside him with the guitar bag on the floor below. He puts a hand on his guitar, then looks at the wall - the wall he now shares with Curt. He gets up, and approaches the wall cautiously.

James puts his ear to the wall. Nothing; not a sound. A while longer. Still nothing.

He turns back to his guitar, then walks back to the bed, sitting down in the same manor. He looks at the "Curt wall" again. He turns back to his guitar, picks it up, strikes the low e-string loudly, then immediately catches it, waiting for a response from the "Curt wall". Nothing.

James goes through his phone. There aren't many names, but there is a "Laura Guidry". He selects it.

James

Hey, it's James. Wanna come over?

James looks at the wall during the conversation.

INT. James'S APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

LAURA GUIDRY, mid-20s, is now on his couch. She looks like the girl next door, wearing scrubs. She

has James's guitar on her lap. She plucks the strings, having no idea how to play.

James has his ear to the wall. He then goes to the window, trying to see if Curt is outside of his apartment. He looks back to Laura and back outside intermittently.

James

Okay, so the same plan as last time.

LAURA

Last time you had a new neighbor, I got a nice dinner afterward.

JAMES

Okay, yeah, that's fine.

Laura is not phased by how weird James is. She's more excited about free dinner as she continues to pluck at the guitar strings.

LAURA

Where are you going to take me?

James

Wherever you want. Is it okay to invite Sam?

LAURA

Sure. Capital City Cafe?

James

I can't go back there. I was in their bathroom and one of the cooks took a leak; didn't wash their hands.

LAURA

Maybe he washed them in the kitchen.

James

I'm not prepared to take that chance. What about our usual place?

Laura

Fine.

James

Okay. Let's pretend we're having a conversation.

LAURA

We are having a conversation.

James approaches Laura and extends out his hands to her.

James

One where he can hear us. Come on, come with me.

She sets the guitar aside and takes his hands. He pulls her off the couch and over to the wall. They both lean on the wall. (DP NOTE: Straight 2 Shot; uncut til nod.)

James (CONT'D)

Okay, so continue the conversation.

LAURA

How was that open mic night?

James

That wasn't the conversation.

LAURA

Did you go on stage?

James and Laura get a little more quiet than before, given the topic and their distance between each other.

James

They were filled up.

LAURA

So you took off?

James

Yeah. Why stick around?

LAURA

You could network - get to know people who play there and run the place.

JAMES

This new neighbor plays there. I saw him on the way in.

LAURA

Did he recognize you?

James

Maybe. He gave me that cool guy nod. You know, like this?

James gives his own uncool version of the cool guy nod, jerking his chin up and down.

James (CONT'D)

You know? So I think he recognized me.

LAURA

Your mom text me about you.

James

She's getting to everyone.

LAURA

And you'll disappoint her.

James

You know me so well.

LAURA

Maybe someday.

James

Maybe. I wish she'd drop it.

LAURA

You're too touchy about this.

JAMES

She talks to everyone but me. Its not something I need to do. Life goes on either way.

LAURA

Of course it does.

Laura smiles shortly, then sighs.

JAMES

I'll show her I can do it. I just need to do it on my own time, you know?

Laura nods. James smiles as he changes the conversation.

James

I don't think this conversation is loud enough for him to hear us. (yells) I'LL SHOW HER! I'LL SHOW ALL OF YOU!

LAURA

You sound like you're gonna kill someone!

James

Just... Just start laughing loud!

They both begin to loudly fake laugh. Back and forth, bigger and bigger laughs! James starts HAMMERING on the wall with his fist. Then puts his head against the wall. More LOUD LAUGHS.
Cut to:

EXT. DOORWAY TO CURT's NEW APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

The door quickly opens revealing James standing behind Laura. Curt's entire vibe is the overly nice, artistically focused hipster.

CURT

Hi, what can I do for you?

LAURA

Hi! We're from next door, and we noticed we were getting a little loud, so we found this to be the perfect opportunity to introduce ourselves and apologize for all of the noise.

CURT

Nice to meet you both. A little noise never hurts anyone. I'm Curt.

LAURA

I'm Laura, and this is James.

James nods.

James shakes his hand the only way he knows how - jerking up to the shoulders, and back down - one time.

CURT

Pleasure to meet you both. Which apartment are you from?

James points while Laura speaks.

LAURA

James is in one sixty four. I don't live here, but I'm there from time to time.

Curt

Very cool, very cool. I'd invite you guys in, but it's still a bit of a mess after moving all day.

LAURA

Oh, no, we just wanted to say hi and apologize about the noise on our way out.

Curt

I appreciate that. I'm sure we'll talk later. Thanks for stopping by.

LAURA

Sure! Bye.

James

Goodbye.

Curt closes the door, as Laura turns back to James. She smiles playfully, and James raises his eyebrows at Laura.

LAURA

You don't say much.

JAMES

I don't say much.

Beat.

James

This is why I need you.

LAURA

And that is why you need me!

James looks at her, as he cracks a goofy smile.

James

So can we go out now?

LAURA

We can.

Laura proceeds to walk away from the doorway. James follows.

INT. Mason's Grill Restaurant - SAME NIGHT

James, Laura and Sam are sitting at a table in a Bar/Grill atmosphere. They have beers in front of them.

SAM

(To Laura)

The damn wall thing again, huh? (To James) He can't hear you!

The group laughs.

SAM

(cont'd)

Hey, remember when we were at that lake house with our cousins? (back to Laura) Have you heard this one?

LAURA

No.

SAM

We were out on this lake with our family and our aunt and uncle got in this huge fight. There we were with three of our younger cousins, and all we wanted to do was swim and get dragged behind the boat.

Sam gets into the story, imitating the motions.

SAM (CONT'D)

So she starts hitting him over the head with whatever she could get her hands on - life vests, fishing poles - and my uncle Frank: he jumps ship!

LAURA

Oh my god!

James

He deserved it.

SAM

What happened was: while we were having a day out there on the lake, my uncle calls her by the wrong name. All of these suspicions became reality all of a sudden!

LAURA

Your uncle never came back?

SAM

No, he was gone! Swimming to shore! Floating out in the middle of Canyon Lake. So no one knew how to drive the boat. So I'm 15! I'm excited to give this a shot! Turns out that asshole took the keys with him.

James

We eventually flagged down another boat.

SAM

Not before getting sun burned to hell. So that night, we're in our rooms and I'm hanging out covered in aloe vera reading some comic book. I look up and Jimmy's standing on the dresser putting his ear to the ceiling.

LAURA

Whaaat? No way.

SAM

He snaps his head away, which causes the whole dresser to start wobbling, cause its some cheap thing that's been in that humid cabin for God knows how long. It falls over in pieces and he comes down on me like he's leaping from the top ropes.

Sam mimics a flying elbow.

LAURA

(to James)

So boys being boys then.

SAM

It all started with his spying.

LAURA

What'd you hear?

SAM

Yeah, tell her what you heard.

JAMES

They were.. making up?

LAURA

Eww, see what that gets you?

JAMES

This is about them hearing me, not the other way around.

SAM

Get used to it. You agreed to marry him.

LAURA

I have weird tastes, what can I say.

James

You two have your issues too.

SAM

Whaaat? We all know my demons, but what's wrong with her?

James

Get ready for this.

Sam and Laura lean in ever so slightly.

James (CONT'D)

She's too nice.

LAURA

Really? That's it?

JAMES

And sweet. And all that other shit that comes on those little candy hearts.

LAURA

(sarcasm)

Awwwww.

SAM

So how's this neighbor?

LAURA

He's a performer, like James pretends to be.

James laughs recognizing the joke.

SAM

Easy, lady!

JAMES

He says he didn't hear anything.

LAURA

Because he didn't. It doesn't matter if he does hear you. He's probably like it.

James

He's been to the open mic nights. And he makes it look so... effortless, you know? He always seems to charm the crowd like nothing you've ever seen before.

SAM

You're in love with this guy? (Laughs) You used to do that too when you were little.

James

But its impressive when any child sings or plays anything. You gotta do more to win them over when you're older.

SAM

You could start by doing. Get this guy to help you.

JAMES

I don't know him...

LAURA

I've been looking up social anxiety therapists...

James

No, not therapy.

SAM

I'm still seeing a therapist.

JAMES

Really?

SAM

Yeah. After the meetings.

James

I don't want my mind probed and I certainly don't want to pay someone to do it. How do you pay for it?

SAM

Group discount.

Sam holds up his chip.

LAURA

You've got that money leftover from your father...

James

That's for us. That'll cover our needs for when you're done with your residency and we get a place of our own. I can't waste it on a process that won't even help me. (to Sam) No offense.

SAM

None taken. But, it really does help. Laura and I know everything about you and we can't seem to help you. Maybe someone else can.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - NEXT DAY

James rides throughout the neighborhood, as he does, delivering papers. He approaches an intersection and waits to cross. A PROMOTER hands him a flyer to promote a show by the band "SHYLIGHT SURVIVORS". He briefly looks down at the flyer, then notices the wall nearby is covered with the same flyers. Next to the grouping are other ads.

The BRIGHT LIGHTS are COMING! THE END IS NEAR!

WANTED: CRIMINAL BY THE NAME OF RED X.

and other references from films. ;)

"YOU'RE NOT CRAZY".

Then some smaller text below it. It reads, "and I'm going to prove it. Need therapy? Free sessions for a limited time. This is the only flyer I put up in town, so its simply fate that you have found it. Fate speaks! You listen. Tear off a number before it's too late. Then take the next step and call that number before it's REALLY too late." He removes his backpack and puts the band's flyer in it. The bottom of the sheet is covered by one of the band's flyers. James lifts it to see that all the numbers are still there. He rips one off.

James

A flyer for therapy...

PROMOTER

Amazing what you can find when you're really looking. See you at the show.

James smiles and nods as the light changes, then rides on through the crosswalk.

ext. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - SAME DAY

James turns off the busier roads and into a neighborhood. As it gets more quiet, he eventually stops the bike. He removes his backpack and pulls out his cellphone. He removes the flyer number from his pocket. He calls the number.

Ring.

JAMES

(to himself)

I hope this is a fucking joke.

Ring.

JOELLEN (O.S)

Hello?

James

Hi, I found your flyer downtown and I was interested in your services.

JOELLEN (O.S)

Flyer? What flyer?

James

Therapy flyer on the corner of 4th and Laurel.

Short pause.

JOELLEN (O.S)

Damnit. That's an old flyer.

James

You aren't a therapist anymore?

JOELLEN (O.S)

I am. But that one's... out of date.

James

I didn't see an expiration.

JOELLEN (O.S)

You know what, that's not important. What's your name?

James

James.

JOELLEN (O.S)

James. Okay. Why don't you come by and we'll talk.

James

Is it still free?

JOELLEN (O.S)

I don't know just yet, James.

James

Well, I can't do it unless its free.

JOELLEN (O.S)

My services have value much like your problems do. I imagine it'd be worth paying to get your life together.

James

Of course I'd pay if I knew there was any chance you could fix them. (beat) I'm sorry, that came out wrong.

JOELLEN (O.S)

Come by James, before 4pm. Address is twenty one, fourteen, Court Street.

Hangs up.

EXT. SAM'S RENTAL HOME - SAME DAY

James rides onto Sam's lawn once again and parks his bike. He hops up the stairs, knocks on the door. Sam opens it. James rushes past him, planting that last newspaper in his chest again.

INT. SAM'S RENTAL TRAILER - SAME DAY

James walks into the trailer, and turns around to Sam. Sam tosses the newspaper into the trash, then

picks up his coffee.

James

Sam, I need to borrow your car.

SAM

Sure. What's the occasion?

James

I thought you said no questions asked.

SAM

Yeah, you're right, I did. Color me curious.

James

I just want to move a couch.

SAM

You can't fit a couch in that car.

James

It's a futon. A futon cushion without the couch part - look, can I borrow it?

SAM

You're not really moving a futon mattress, are you?

James

No.

SAM

Driver's license up to date?

James

Yeah.

SAM

Driving far?

James

Across the river.

SAM

Is Laura going with you?

James

No, it's just me.

SAM

Well, where's she going to be?

James

You know, for a no questions asked conversation, this sounds like a parole hearing.

SAM

I know parole hearings. They just tell you what they want out of you and you answer yes or no.

James

Then here's one yes or no question. Can I have the keys, please?

SAM

Yeah, here.

James grips the keys in front of him.

James

Thank you, Sam. Walking to work, right?

SAM

Yeah.

James

You have a meeting tonight?

SAM

Yeah.

James

Okay, I'll be back before then. Thanks Sam!

James speeds out of the door.

SAM

(to himself)

You're welcome. Fill up the tank with some of that newspaper money.

ext. The doorway of JoEllen Foster. - SAME DAY

James arrives in his brother's car at a generic home. He approaches the door.

Knock, knock, knock.

Barking is heard from inside. James hears JoEllen inside.

JoEllen

Come on, Buddy, that ain't the mailman. Take it easy.

JoEllen Foster, a woman in her 30s, opens the door. She is wearing glasses and mismatched clothing. Her hair is up but still a mess.

JoEllen

Are you James?

The dog sniffs James in the doorway.

James

Yeah.

JoEllen

I'm JoEllen.

James shakes JoEllen's hand. Up once, down once.

JoEllen (Cont'd)

Come on in.

James enters.

INT. THE HOME OF JoEllen Foster. - SAME DAY

James enters into a common enough home. It's a bit messy.

JoEllen

Welcome to my office. Have a seat wherever. Do you drink coffee?

James

No.

James heads for the couch and takes a seat. JoEllen goes into the kitchen to make herself a cup of coffee.

JoEllen

What do you drink?

JAMES

I'm okay for now.

James looks around the home and observes his surroundings. The mess. Random papers. Picture frames with the stock footage families in them. The dog.

JAMES

Do you get a lot of visitors?

JOELLEN

Lots.

She observes him looking around - where he looks.

JOELLEN

Are you nervous?

JAMES

No. Well, a little.

JOELLEN

Who told you to come see me?

JAMES

I found that flyer.

JOELLEN

You probably see 100s of flyers a day. What made you want to call that one?

JAMES

Oh. well... (interrupted)

JoEllen, coffee in hand, drags a chair stool from the bar-high table to the couch. James returns a quizzical look. JoEllen sits with the chair backwards.

JoEllen (CONT'D)

We normally sit at the table.

James

Should I move?

JoEllen

Nah, I'm just keeping my distance in case you're a psychopath.

JoEllen sips her coffee calmly. James is more nervous and moving in his seat.

James (CONT'D)

So what do I talk about?

JOELLEN

You could answer my question from before.

JAMES

Oh right. I guess I'm just trying to open up.

JOELLEN

Then open up.

JAMES

I don't know what to say.

JoEllen

Literally anything, James.

JAMES

Are you always this pushy?

JOELLEN

I'm allowed to be when I'm not being paid to be nice.

JAMES

So this is free?

JoEllen sighs.

JOELLEN

Maybe. Forget about that and tell me why you're here.

JAMES

I have... stage fright.

JoEllen

Stage fright? (Laughs) Here's what you do. Don't go on stage.

James

I've been avoiding it.

JoEllen

Then what's the problem?

James

Everyone thinks I shouldn't avoid it.

JoEllen

Who's everyone?

James

Friends. Family. Fiance.

JoEllen

Those damn "F" words every time.

James

I sign up to play guitar at open mic nights, but I always feed myself some excuse to take off before my name is called.

JoEllen

Ah. I used to dabble in piano, but now it may as well be a boat anchor.

JoEllen motions to the piano in the room.

JoEllen (CONT'D)

You play piano?

James

Yeah.

JoEllen

Then play it.

James

No thanks.

JoEllen

No?

James

Yeah, I'm not in the mood.

JoEllen

This isn't a stage, James. There's not an audience hiding in the back.

James

I can't perform in front of people.

JoEllen

But not everyone.

James

No. I can play in front of people close to me. I know, its weird... right?

JoEllen

I deal in weird everyday. This is very light weird. You've just got a plug in that head of yours that we need to unclog. But before we dive deep into that, my fee is normally one fifty an hour.

James

A hundred and fifty dollars?

JoEllen

Not a dollar fifty, so yeah - a hundred and fifty dollars. (beat) But you did find my flyer, and I'm not one to falsely advertise. It's my fault I didn't put an expiration date on it. Did you read the whole thing?

James

Yeah, but I was mostly attracted to the "free therapy" part.

JoEllen

That's all anyone saw. It's a bunch of bullshit anyway. I had them all over the place. Thought I took them all down.

James

So it is free?

JoEllen

Yeah, but I'll tell you this: I'm much nicer to the people who pay.

EXT. SAM'S PLACE - SAME EVENING

The sun is starting to drop. James comes back with Sam's car. As he gets out of the car, another car pulls up and parks. MIRANDA, skinny and attractive, but strung out looking early twenty something, stands up outside of her car and yells over to James.

MIRANDA

Hey, have you seen Sam?

Sam opens the front door and makes his way to James.

James

(to Miranda)

Who are you?

MIRANDA

I'm Miranda, I'm here to pick him up.

On the way to Miranda's car, Sam give James a brotherly hug.

James

(To Sam)

You don't need a ride - Here's your keys.

James places Sam's keys in Sam's hand.

SAM

(Looking at Miranda, talking to James)

Thanks bro, but I think I'm gonna carpool today.

Sam has a "new love" smile on his face.

James

To your meeting? With her?

SAM

Yeah, you're always telling me to be green and save gas.

James

No, I just don't want to pay for gas.

SAM

Sure, sure. Hey, thanks for the keys. Let me know if you need them again.

Sam takes off for Miranda's car.

SAM (CONT'D)

(yelling to James)

Take care, bro!

Upset with Sam, James watches them drive away.

EXT. APARTMENT mailboxes - SAME NIGHT

James rides up on his bike to the apartment mailboxes. He opens his mailbox and grabs his mail.

INT. James'S APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James is holding his bank statement over a torn open letter. \$1943.67 left in his account. James sighs. He looks to his guitar, like it has all the answers.

INT. DAILY GRIND - SAME NIGHT

James approaches the counter where Barry is talking to a REGULAR CUSTOMER.

James

Hey Barry, where's the open mic setup?

BARRY

Only on Tuesdays now. Not enough interest on a Friday night.

James

Damnit.

BARRY

You were gonna play this time?

James

Yeah, I was gonna play. There's not even anything going on in here right now.

BARRY

What changed?

JAMES

Nothing. Don't worry about it. I'm just trying to work some stuff out.

BARRY

If you want to play for tips on the sidewalk out front, be my guest.

Barry returns to talking to the REGULAR CUSTOMER. James sighs again, contemplating if he can go through with it.

EXT. DAILY GRIND - SAME NIGHT

James walks outside with a chair taken from inside the restaurant. He puts it down a few feet from the door, sits, opens his guitar case, puts the guitar on his knee, leaves the case open for tips. He sits looking down at his guitar for a long while. His left hand makes the motions, but his right hand holds the strings, not allowing sound to escape.

Sound silences awaiting music that never comes. The silence is broken as a PASSER-BY exits the shop. He lights a cigarette and/or checks his phone.

PASSER-BY (CONT'D)

You gonna play?

James

I'm warming up.

The passer-by tosses a dollar into the case.

PASSER-BY

All right. You better be good.

The passer-by continues to smoke and/or check his phone while James continues making motions but no sounds.

PASSER-BY (CONT'D)

You ain't tunin' or nothin'. You gonna play sometime tonight?

James

I am.

The frustrated passer-by snatches his money back out of the case.

James (CONT'D)

Sir, please.

PASSER-BY

I'ma get me some coffee inside. Be warmed up when I come out here.

The passer-by goes inside. James closes his eyes, trying to psyche himself up for the moment. Deep breath. Deep breath. A man, GABE LARSON (60s), well-dressed, exits the Grind and begins to walk away from the shop. The door to the Daily Grind opens back up immediately. The passer-by approaches James.

PASSER-BY (CONT'D)

Man, close the case and get yourself some cardboard and a Sharpie.

The frustration of the Passer-By grabs Gabe's attention. He approaches James after the passer-by leaves.

GABE

I couldn't talk til I was in high school.

James has an attitude as he goes on the defensive.

James

I can talk fine.

GABE

But that voice doesn't mean as much to you as that voice, does it?

Gabe points at James' face and then at the guitar. James' attitude changes as this guy might have good advice.

GABE

When I finally spoke up, I had a lot to say. It took me places. Now I don't know if you're any good - or if you can play at all. But when its your time to speak, or in your case play, you'll know it.

Gabe reaches into a money clip.

GABE

Don't push yourself. Have a good night.

Gabe drops a twenty dollar bill in the guitar case, then walks away. James is upset at himself. He kicks the case shut.

EXT. James'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

James comes back home from the grind. Curt is playing his guitar outside the apartment. James tries to get past him without sparking conversation, so he darts for his own door.

CURT

Hey, James, right?

Busted. James stops and turn to Curt.

James

Yeah.

CURT

Let me know if I'm playing too loud. You just get a different sound when ya play outside.

Curt admires the sky.

CURT (CONT'd)

And it's a perfect night for it.

James

Nope. Play on, no problem.

CURT

Where did you play tonight? (beat) You have your guitar. On your back.

JAMES

Oh, right. Just around town. All over the place.

CURT

Cool man - hey, look - if you aren't doing anything later, I've got some friends coming by - Call it a housewarming. You're welcome to come by.

James

Laura's coming by...

CURT

She can come to! There's a few other people coming from around the complex. You probably know 'em better than I do.

James

Us talking right now is the most I've talked to any of my neighbors.

CURT

Well, I think it's time for a change then.

James

I'll mention it to Laura. You know, we'll see.

CURT

Okay man, stay cool.

James

I'll do my best.

INT. James'S APARTMENT - SAME night

James and Laura sit on the couch, watching television.

James

You're going to be proud of me.

LAURA

Shh, Bachelor. (long beat) Okay, commercial, what's up?

James

I took your advice and I talked to someone about my issues.

LAURA

A therapist?

James nods and turns to Laura. Laura is excited.

James

Don't get too excited. It's sort of a trial thing and I don't even believe it'll work.

LAURA

Why wouldn't it work?

JAMES

This lady is a crazy person. Her place is a mess and she keeps stock photos of complete strangers all throughout her house.

LAURA

She works out of her house?

James

Yeah. And she's very mean. Are they suppose to be mean?

LAURA

How'd you find this person?

James

I don't know. Internet or something. All that matters is that it's free.

LAURA

Well, that's not all that matters...

JAMES

If it's a bust I'll go find someone else. I just wanted you to be aware of it in case she harvests my body parts or something. I don't want you to be shocked when I show up at your hospital in pieces.

LAURA

Oh good, you'll finally come see me at work then! Tell her to carve you up now, since I'll be done with my residency soon.

James

You're not staying there?

LAURA

They can't afford me.

James

I've always wanted to say that and mean it.

LAURA

You're still open to the option of moving, aren't you?

James

Yeah.

LAURA

What about Sam? And your mother?

James

They said they'd move with us too.

LAURA

(laughs)

No, I mean are you okay with being away from them?

James turns back to the television.

James

We live in the age of Skype. It'll be fine.

LAURA

I've been looking into hospitals on the west coast. I think it'll be good for your music to be out there.

James

This isn't about my music. I can make music anywhere. You lead the way and I will follow.

LAURA

Okay.

Laura turns to the windows as a group walks by.

LAURA

Looks like your neighbor is having his first party.

James

He's having a housewarming thing.

LAURA

Oh really.

James

Yeah, he invited both of us -

LAURA

- We should go!

James

(making up something quick)

I don't know, I'm starting to come around on this Bachelor show...

LAURA

Show's over. (turns off tv) Put on your shoes. Let's go be social.

Laura gets up and heads to the bathroom to prepare. James sits, reluctant to prepare.

int. Curt's Place - SAME NIGHT

There are about ten people here, including Curt. Curt's crowd = hipsters. They are all sitting around Curt while he tells stories.

Music is coming lightly from the stereo. Something like Arcade Fire - Wake Up, but indie. Curt recalls this tale like any heart touching moment.

CURT

(to crowd)

... But she couldn't get a hold of anyone. The cashier was just completely unsympathetic - his face said "someone get this old lady out of my store", so I spoke up and asked her if she needed a ride home. And the poor thing could barely hear me, so she was already confused. She said "Are you a taxi service?" And I said "No ma'am, but I'd love to help and give you a ride home. So I gave her a ride home, which happened to be in this complex, and that's how I found the place.

Laura and James enter into the apartment.

CURT (CONT'D)

It's amazing what you can discover just by being that helping hand when someone needs it. It only takes thirty minutes, you might end up finding a new place, and you just feel great for doing it.

The crowd agrees. The women "awww", and the men nod in approval.

LAURA

Hey, thanks for the invite!

CURT

You're welcome, thanks for coming! Everyone, this is Laura and James, my neighbors to the right.
Laura, James - this is everyone!

EVERYONE

[Hello's and Hi's]

James and Laura return casual hellos.

CURT

We were just talking about how I found this place. (To James) How'd you find yourself here?

James

(beat) Classifieds.

Long beat as Curt's friends aren't as impressed by this story.

CURT

Who needs refills?

Curt collects empty bottles, then heads to the kitchen. While doing so, James turns to Laura.

James

(To Laura)

These people smell funny.

LAURA

Be nice.

James

I'm just gonna go wait at home.

LAURA

(harsh whisper)

Don't leave here!

The rest of the crowd return to each other's company, and Laura joins in one.

LAURA

Oh I love your scarf, did you make that? (continue dribble)

James is left standing alone but surrounded by group now preoccupied with each other.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF CURT'S PLACE - SAME NIGHT

James walks outside of Curt's place. He has a "red solo cup" in hand. White Christmas lights shine on the facade, a few chairs and Curt's guitar. James looks at it, then plucks down the strings. He immediately looks around to see if anyone heard him. He closes the door to the apartment. He sits down, puts his cup down, grabs the guitar and begins to play. He hums along with what he's playing, trying to fit words as well.

James

...Close the case, get some cardboard and a Sharpie...

Curt appears behind James in the window - which is open. He overhears James's guitar playing. Beautiful. A HIPSTER VISITOR walks into the kitchen. We hear this slightly muffled through the window.

HIPSTER VISITOR

Hey Curt, where do you keep the good beers?

James's nerves take over as he grips the neck to mute the sound.

CURT

Bottom shelf.

Curt disappears from the kitchen window and walks outside and takes a seat next to James.

CURT

You can't stop playing. I'm not done listening.

James

I'm sorry, I should have asked if I could use your guitar.

James attempts to put the guitar back, but Curt puts his hand in front of it, forcing it to stay in James's lap.

CURT

It's no problem. What were you playing?

James

Nothing - just playing around.

CURT

Please, play it again.

James

I don't know. My fingers just started hurting, and it's been a while since I've played. You should play something.

Curt can see James getting more and more nervous. He decides to not push for it anymore.

CURT

Okay, I'll play a bit. But you have to stay and give me some pointers. I'm more of a G-C-D-chord guitar player.

James

That covers everything on the radio.

Curt begins to play some simple stuff.

James

Your rhythm and strumming is key. You're playing just fine.

CURT

I appreciate that. I could always use some lessons from a good teacher.

James

I'm no teacher.

CURT

Anyone can teach those willing to learn - and I'm willing to learn.

Beat.

James

What do you like to do when you're not here entertaining your friends and neighbors?

CURT

I'm a street artist.

James

Ah, of course you are. (beat) Where do you... do that?

CURT

I keep around the levee. Sometimes I take it over to the university.

James takes a drink.

CURT

(cont'd)

It's fulfilling. The pay's unsteady. But I had a nine to five once. Then life has a way of letting you know you're doing it all wrong.

Curt smiles and shakes his head. James endures.

CURT

So I'm trying to get more into music - Just singing though. I just jumped on board with a cover band called Red Light. Heard of 'em?

James

Nope.

CURT

Typical covers for now, nothing special. Still not making money, but we've got some things lined up. Are you in a band?

James

I used to play with my brother. Not really a band per say. More like just goofing around.

Curt nods in agreement.

James (CONT'D)

He was really good about finding my sound. I wouldn't have to tell him much. He just knew how to do

it, as if he wrote the songs with me. But, he sold his drums a few years back, so we don't do that anymore.

CURT

You always write and play your own stuff?

James

Yeah.

CURT

How long have you been doing that?

JAMES

Always. I have piles of songs laying around. But there isn't an audience for the kind of stuff I write.

CURT

What genre?

James

Autobiographical. Like a journal. Not meant to be shared. Your style - like in the coffee shop - is more like, say, a young adult novel, which is great - cause its what people want.

CURT

All music is meant to be shared. It's like that saying when a tree falls in the forest, no one hears it. How is anyone going to hear the greatest song ever to be made if it's not shared?

James

I'm not writing the greatest songs.

CURT

Well, prove it by playing right now. (He offers the guitar) Or, show me piles.

INT. James'S APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

Curt enters slowly, while looking around speechless. He has same wonder in his eyes as the children entering Wonka's chocolate factory.

James (CONT'D)

Laura put it all together. She thought it would make the place more "me".

CURT

This place is wild.

James

It's just a few of the songs. Mostly Laura's favorites.

CURT

Wow. (beat) Sorry, I can't get over this. You are one talented motherfucker.

James

Mmm... Thanks.

CURT

Maybe even a bit crazy. And some of this is from when you were young?

James

Yeah. Starting from around first grade.

CURT

You know when I wrote my first song?

James

When?

CURT

I'll let you know when it happens.

James

Aah.

CURT

Damn, man, I envy you. This is incredible.

James

No, this is just how I vent. Some of these are just nonsense.

CURT

With this volume, you could have a load of duds and you'll still come out with some great material.
And it's so personal.

Curt holds a paper in hand.

James

All of these songs come from a place in my life. I can read these lyrics or hear the notes and remember things... like an audible memory.

James begins to point at the wall, pointing out specifics.

James (CONT'D)

You can see my progression as I began to better understand music. At first, I used lines to represent pitches til I learned about using the staff and notes. (long beat) This wall represents years of neglecting grade school.

CURT

Time well spent.

Beat.

James

Should we head back?

CURT

I want to hear these, James.

James

Maybe.

CURT

Not maybe. I want to hear them all. How can I convince you that this is important? It's so rare to possess a unique voice. All my life I've only done covers.

James

You play them well, though.

CURT

But I'm not exactly reinventing the wheel. I would love to play stuff like this.

Curt motions to the walls. Beat.

CURT (CONT'D)

So how about it?

James

You want to play my music?

CURT

I want to cover it. Because you're an artist in your own right, playing your own music. I'm just tired of playing the same shit someone else played better. I'm waiting for the day when I can play a song for the first time and no one sings along. They just... listen.

James

That's kind of weird, isn't it?

CURT

I guess, but I think that's why I like it.

James

Yeah. (long beat) I think I like it too.

James quickly scans the wall and pulls one of the pages off of the bottom.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Here, start with this one.

James hands Curt the paper. RISE headlines it.

CURT

RISE... I appreciate it.

James

I always said if I had a band, this would be on the set list. Everything's there. Just promise me you'll do something crazy with it.

CURT

We will man. We'll have some fun with it.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF CURT'S PLACE - SAME NIGHT

Curt and James exit James's apartment. Laura is sitting outside - slightly drunk.

LAURA

What were you two up to?

CURT

He was giving me the tour. It's really something in there.

Laura sees the paper in Curt's hand.

LAURA

(surprised/disbelief)

A souvenir?

James

For his band.

Curt holds it up proudly - like a second grader proud of his first A+.

LAURA

That's... unexpected.

JAMES

What?

LAURA

You've never done that before.

JAMES

I don't know what's wrong with that.

CURT

I hope this isn't a problem.

JAMES

It's fine.

LAURA

I'm just.. I need to lay down.

JAMES

Alright. Let's go.

James helps Laura up and to his apartment.

CURT

I'll talk to you later.

JAMES

Sure, thanks for the invite.

INT. JAMES'S APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

Laura is lying on the bed under a sheet. James is lying next to her on top of the sheet. Same clothes as before. Laura is still slightly drunk. This is a quiet and intimate conversation.

LAURA

I'm sorry. I don't know what I was saying.

JAMES

It's fine. You're not wrong. I haven't done it before.

LAURA

Then why did you do it?

JAMES

I was tired of things being the same. (beat) I figured if I just push myself and do things differently, I'd have to adapt.

LAURA

I like you the way you are.

JAMES

I... think there's room for improvement - In me! Not you.

Laura smiles and laughs. Still drunk.

LAURA

I like that song you gave him.

JAMES

Oh yeah?

LAURA

Yeah. I know they mean a lot to you.

JAMES

Yeah.

LAURA

Play it.

JAMES

Okay.

James reaches over and grabs his guitar from the stand. He begins to play. As James is about to sing, Laura puts her finger on his lips to hush him.

JAMES

Oh, you know it? (she nods) Okay.

He continues to play as she sings his song. (If you need a song here to imagine, go for "The Moon Song" by Karen O).

INT. JoEllen's HOME - DAY

James is laying on the couch in the therapist routine. (DP: Cam overhead) JoEllen pours herself a cocktail at the nearby bar, then returns to the stool placed in front of the couch.

JoEllen

Why do you put yourself in these positions?

James

I don't know...

JoEllen

You're still a coward James. You and your guitar don't belong at parties and you certainly don't belong on the street. You have to play for tips. Play. Do you know what that means?

James

I need the money.

JoEllen

Baby steps. Like in Groundhog Day. You know that movie?

James

Yeah.

JoEllen

Love that movie. (beat) And don't hang around your neighbor. He's a constant reminder that you don't have what he has.

James

I'm okay with that.

JOELLEN

Oh, well you're cured then. I am really good at this!

JAMES

No, I mean if this doesn't work and I never go on stage... I think I'd be okay with that.

JOELLEN

You don't need the spotlight?

JAMES

No. There's a place for songwriters.

JOELLEN

Sure!

JAMES

It's a respectable career.

JOELLEN

Yeah!

JAMES

Better than being a paperboy.

JOELLEN

Totally!

JAMES

Yeah!

JOELLEN

Then why are you trying to hard to get in the spotlight?

JAMES

I don't know another way to get this music out of my head.

JOELLEN

So Curt is that answer for you. He's your voice now.

JAMES

No, that's just one song.

JOELLEN

Why not another?

JAMES

He didn't ask for another.

JOELLEN

And if he does?

JAMES

I might see where it goes.

JOELLEN

I guess that's something you'll have to find out on your own then.

JAMES

You're not going to tell me what to do?

JOELLEN

No. Is that what you think I do?

JAMES

You've been doing that since we've met.

JOELLEN

Since you're so obedient, bring your guitar next time. I want to keep it here.

JAMES

Why?

JOELLEN

Call it an exercise of desire. Who's going to miss it?

JAMES

Laura mostly.

JOELLEN

You, mostly.

JAMES

Oh, right.

JOELLEN

Right. You need to remember that you're number one in your life, okay?

JAMES

Okay.

JOELLEN

Say it.

JAMES

I'm number one.

JOELLEN

Like you mean it.

JAMES

(loud voice)

I'M NUMBER ONE.

JOELLEN

Okay! Now, who else is gonna hunt me down if I never give back your guitar?

JAMES

My brother. My mom.

JOELLEN

And dad.

JAMES

No, not dad. He wasn't a fan.

JOELLEN

Where is he now?

JAMES

He's gone. Died when I was nine. Car accident.

JOELLEN

Why wasn't he a fan of you?

JAMES

I don't want to get into it.

JOELLEN

I know you don't, but this is where you get into things like that.

JAMES

Not right now, please.

JOELLEN

James, I have a process. You are delaying it.

James is very uncomfortable.

JOELLEN (CONT'D)

But I suppose we've been here long enough for today. I imagine it's a long story.

James nods rapidly.

JOELLEN (CONT'D)

Okay. Next time then. Promise me you'll be here.

James nods.

INT. SAM'S PLACE - DAY

Sam is sitting in a robe in a chair. James sits nearby on the couch reading the paper. TV's on.

James

(to paper)

Why am I still doing this?

SAM

(to TV)

I don't have the slightest idea.

JAMES

I'm a lazy manchild.

SAM

Did your shrink say that?

James

No. (beat) How did you know about that?

SAM

You borrow my car the same day every week. (long beat) And Laura told me.

James sighs.

James

I'm a thirty year old paper boy.

SAM

Paper man.

James

I should have an adult job. You fix cars, Laura fixes people...

SAM

Some people aren't motivated by title or money.

James

I need to start being motivated.

SAM

You need money?

James hesitates.

James

No. And you don't have any.

SAM

Did you touch your inheritance?

James

A little bit.

Sam looks away from the TV at James.

SAM

That's fifteen grand. Don't be like me and blow it. You're better than that.

James

Why am I better than that?

SAM

Cause you're not going to blow it all on drugs and women. You should be selling your songs. People make millions doing that.

JAMES

You're talking about people who know people. I'm just some guy.

SAM

Everyone started out as just some guy til eventually they became that guy.

James

I have a song out on loan.

SAM

What the hell does that mean?

James

I gave a song to my neighbor.

SAM

That's bullshit. Let em' write his own stuff.

James

I like it this way.

SAM

What makes him better than you?

JAMES

I never said he was better than me.

SAM

He's not. Don't let him or anyone have what you have for nothing.

JAMES

I'm just trying something new. I never...

A woman walks in from the back room. MIRANDA is wearing clothes, whose wrinkles tell a story that she wore them yesterday.

SAM

Hey! Miranda, you remember James, right?

She is nice enough, but kind of spacey.

MIRANDA

Hey. Listen, I gotta jet to work. Let's do this again.

SAM

Absolutely.

James looks like he's never seen this Sam before. Sam walks her to the door. A kiss, she leaves. Sam watches her leave through a window.

James

That girl was in your house.

SAM

I know, right?

James

Why was that girl in your house?

Sam turns around to James.

SAM

I can have people at my house, Jimmy.

James

Your words were: I need to ward off women to focus on sobriety.

SAM

I know what I said, but hell... I've been sober for nearly 10 months - I can be with a woman if I want to.

James

That's fine. It was your rule anyway. (beat) Where'd you meet her? At work?

Sam begins cleaning up after breakfast.

SAM

I met her at the meetings.

James

How long has she been sober?

SAM

Like a month or two.

James

Wow. A month. Or two.

SAM

Two months is something, okay?

James

It is.

SAM

I was there before. Two months is an accomplishment. A big accomplishment.

James

I take it she has sturdy moral support at home?

Sam stops cleaning and looks at James as if you say, "Come on."

JAMES (CONT'D)

The only reason I ask is because I was here day one. Month one. And every month after. And you're right, it is a big accomplishment to get to that point, but it takes a lot more than sitting alone marking off days on a calendar to get to the point you're at now.

SAM

She's got me, okay?

James

But you just met... no... you're right. You know what you're doing. (beat) You do know what you're doing...

SAM

Yeah, Jimmy, I know. I know what I'm doing.

James

Cause it's the last thing any of us want. For you to...

SAM

I know what I'm doing.

EXT. James'S APARTMENT AREA - NIGHT

James comes home to his apartment to find Curt hanging out next door outside with his band mates LIAM, BEN, and JASON.

CURT

Hey, James!

Curt motions James over.

CURT (CONT'D)

This is Liam, Ben, and Jason. This is James. He wrote that song.

Warm greetings and thanks are given from our band members.

James

(awkward)

Hi guys, I like your music. Big fan.

James is trying to be cute, but they don't get it.

CURT

Ah, I get it.

The band gets it after Curt does. Mild laughs.

James

Alright. Well, I've been at it all day. It was nice to meet you all.

They wave and say goodbyes. James walks away. Curt watches as if something is on his mind.

INT. James'S APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James is sitting on the edge of his bed. His left hand playing an imaginary guitar. He can still hear the notes.

After a short while, there is a knock at the door. He stands up and makes his way to the door and opens it. It's Curt.

CURT

Hey, can I talk to you?

James

Sure, come in.

CURT enters, still admiring the wall art. He turns back to James.

CURT

We're loving that song you wrote. We're doing a lot with it.

James

Cool. That's good.

CURT

I want you to know that we're going to represent and respect you everytime we play your music. And we want to do more of it.

JAMES

More songs, then...

CURT

I have to catch you up on everything though. We've played the song live...

JAMES

People heard it?

CURT

Yeah. Good shows too. But we want to focus on you, James.

JAMES

What do you mean?

CURT

We want to name this band after you. "Chelere".

James takes a moment. A smile peeks through.

CURT (CONT'D)

It stands out, its different - and with the music behind it, people will know it. And you deserve to be a part of this band. I mean, I know you can't be up there with us. Maybe in the future, but right now, we want to build something together with you.

JAMES

You haven't heard anything else. Why do you think this'll work?

CURT

Look around you. I can't think of a reason why this wouldn't work.

James looks at his work.

JAMES

Sam and I called ourselves a band.

CURT

What was the name?

James

Pizza Party.

Beat.

CURT

That's not a bad name.

James

I know, right?

CURT (CONT'D)

I tell everyone who asks: James Chelere wrote this song. I want to just make it official across the board. Otherwise, we'll be Pizza Party, cause that'll be the only kind of gigs we'll get playing pop covers.

James breaks away from the conversation and begins to pick off papers from the wall. He goes to his bookshelf and goes through the notebooks. He comes across a newspaper article about his car accident. He puts it aside. He hands the songs to Curt.

JAMES

How about twelve songs, plus the one you have.

CURT

Lucky number thirteen.

JAMES

And these will compliment one another.

CURT

I don't know what to say. Thank you Mr. Chelere. Every 1st Tuesday we'll be playing at the Moon. Come by sometime.

James

Yeah, maybe.

Curt hugs James then pats him on the arm. Curt walks out of the apartment, and with the door still open, turns to his band and holds up the papers.

CURT

We're Chelere!

Off screen, the band celebrates with cheers and clinking beer bottles. Curt laughs and smiles as he points at James. He reaches for the door and closes it.

James picks up the newspaper spread containing the article about the accident. The headline reads "Child survives deadly accident thanks to first responder". A murky black and white photo poorly details the scene of the accident.

INT. JoEllen'S HOME - DAY

Dialogue starts over the scene before and carries into this scene. James is lying on the couch. The shot is floating over him as he looks past the camera at the ceiling.

James

Days after Christmas, we were coming home from Texas. My dad was driving. My mom in the passenger seat; Sam and I in the back. Sam was sleeping. I had our six month old puppy named "Butch" by my side, also asleep. I had a guitar in my lap - child's size. Gift from the grandfolks. I had been playing since we hit the road. He told me to stop, but I didn't. Mom told him to take it easy. He ignored her, and decided to turn around and look at me and let me know he meant business. We locked eyes, then bam. (James claps). Car pulled out in front of us and we hit it - full speed, no brakes. I came to and my dog was clawing the shit out of me, trying to climb out. It leaped out of a broken window and got run over by a passing car. Sam didn't have a scratch on him. Dad died. Mom stayed in the hospital for weeks - major head trauma and a broken arm. You wouldn't know any of it from reading that article though.

JoEllen is overlooking the article while listening. Tears.

James (CONT'D)

It only talks about the infant from the other car - How it flew out the window and into the field - like something out of a tall tale. He lived though. (beat) My dad didn't. No mention of that.

JoEllen

Every part of this... every mistake that was made... None of it was because of you.

James

But if I had just stopped...

JoEllen

Nothing would have changed. I know you believe that you could have made a difference, but there are things that happen that are outside of your control.

James

He was a good driver. He could have swerved or hit the brakes.

JoEllen

It was beyond your control, James.

James

I know that, but it is my fault that my dad couldn't do anything about it.

JoEllen

Why would you still play music at all, if that were true?

James

I don't know.

JoEllen

If you caused that accident simply because you played your music - Then you need to stop playing music. I'm surprised a tanker truck hasn't come barreling through your living room every time you pluck a string.

James gets up and walks away from JoEllen.

James

Don't fuck with me right now.

JoEllen gets up and follows.

JoEllen

You hear how crazy you sound? I can't be the first person to tell you that you're crazy for thinking any of that was your fault.

James

I could have made a difference in that moment.

JoEllen

Isn't that life, though? You make thousands of decisions in a day. There's no going back on any of those. You've got to learn to accept it like everyone else.

James

I just want that one decision back.

James closes his eyes as tears squeeze through.

JoEllen

I know you do James, but that's not an option. And it'll never, ever be one.

JoEllen looks to her pictures.

JOELLEN (CONT'D)

We all have things we want to change. Things we want to... forget. So we have to try to forget the best we can. Or you'll eventually wish you were dead. (very long beat) I guess we're done for the day.

INT. SAM'S PLACE - SAME NIGHT

James arrives at the door - keys in hand. Knocks. Sam answers.

JAMES

Here's the keys.

James turns around to leave.

SAM

Hey, hold up. Let's hang out.

James looks tired and like he's been crying. Mostly because he's tired and was crying.

SAM (CONT'D)

Oh, she really got into you, didn't she?

INT. RESTAURANT - SAME NIGHT

SAM

Yeah. That day sucked. Pops was pissed at me too.

JAMES

Oh yeah?

SAM

We stopped for gas before we headed out. I swiped a candy bar from the gas station and he busted me.

JAMES

Was he pissed?

SAM

He was disappointed. I was too, I guess. I didn't see him do it, but he said he paid for it. "What if you had gotten caught?", he said. What if... (beat) Don't keep asking "What if?". Stick to "What Now?"

JAMES

What now?

SAM

Right... What now?

JAMES

A drink. That is what's now.

James looks around for the waitress.

SAM

Hell yeah.

JAMES

Yeah right, I meant for me. You've had enough drinks for a lifetime.

SAM

Nah, I got it under control. I knew you'd freak out, so I didn't tell you. I can have a few now and then.

James looks back at Sam.

JAMES

What? When did this happen?

SAM

Don't worry about it!

JAMES

Are you using again too?

SAM

Come on, don't be stupid. Drinking was never my vice.

JAMES

But when you're drunk, the other stuff doesn't seem so bad.

SAM

I'm not getting drunk!

Beat.

JAMES

Fine. You don't get to drink more than me.

SAM

Fair enough.

JAMES

One beer. That's all I'm having.

SAM

Good for you. (beat) Very responsible. I'll let you keep my keys. Cause one beer - I'm gone!

JAMES

I will need your car tomorrow if that's cool.

SAM

It is. I'll be too hammered from my one beer to drive it anyway.

JAMES

Alright, alright. Do you want to know why?

SAM

No, I don't care. (beat) Okay, why?

JAMES

JoEllen suggested an immediate follow up. Strike while the iron's hot.

SAM

Just drive it home tonight.

JAMES

I don't have a parking space. I'll come get it in the morning.

EXT. Streets - SAME NIGHT

James is riding his bike back home from his brother's house. In the camera frame and in focus is a CHELERE poster advertising their live play. Out of focus: James passes it up, then - SCREEECH. He stops the bike, hops off, then runs to the poster and pulls it off the wall. He is beyond excited. People are finally going to know who he is.

EXT. SAM'S PLACE - DAY

James arrives at Sam's place. Miranda's car is parked nearby. Sam's keys are in the front door of the house. James unlocks the door, removes them, and enters.

INT. SAM'S PLACE - SAME DAY

James walks into an empty place. No breakfast has been made. No coffee in the pot. James leans at the bedroom door to talk through it.

James

Hello? I'm stealing your car!

The door opens just enough for Miranda to squeeze her face through. She covers herself up, and she looks like she hasn't slept in days. They talk to each other the way you do when someone is sleeping in the other room.

MIRANDA

Shhh. We had a late night, he's still asleep.

James

I just need to ask him if I can borrow the car.

MIRANDA

Just take it, I'll drive him if he needs to go somewhere.

James gets pushy.

James

I need to ask him something else.

MIRANDA

We're not dressed and he sleeps like a rock.

James looks at the door, then back at her.

James

Yeah, I guess he does. I know he's suppose to work later. Are you gonna take him?

MIRANDA

I'll take him if he doesn't want to walk.

James

Well just make sure he gets up in time.

MIRANDA

I will!

Miranda closes the door. James watches it close. He jiggles the keys in his hand, then walks out.

EXT. Outside JoEllen's HOME, STREET - SAME DAY

James arrives at JoEllen's house. She is sitting in a fold out chair in her front yard with James' guitar case. He gets out of the car.

JAMES

What the hell is this?

JOELLEN

Are you missing your guitar, yet?

JAMES

I'm getting by.

JOELLEN

Lie to me and tell me you're missing it. You're suppose to be missing it.

JAMES

Alright. I'm missing it.

JOELLEN

You get to play it today.

JAMES

Why?

JOELLEN

I figured you'd be more excited than that. Here, take it.

JoEllen hands James the guitar case.

JAMES

You want me to play right here?

JOELLEN

No, there.

She points at the car.

JAMES

Oh, I see what you're doing.

JOELLEN

Pretty good, right? Let's go.

JAMES

No, I'm not doing that. Let's just go inside and talk about stuff.

JOELLEN

The iron is hot, James! Didn't I say that?

JAMES

Yeah.

JOELLEN

What do we do when the iron is hot?

JAMES

Strike.

JOELLEN

Strike!

She punches one hand into the other.

JOELLEN

Now go. GO.

She pushes him to the car.

INT. SAM'S CAR - SAME DAY

James is in the back seat. JoEllen is in the front passenger sitting backwards. Jo turns the key to power on the car (Sound: Ding Ding) so she can bring down all of the windows. Once all completely open, then she turns off the car. A moment passes.

JAMES

It's still hot in here.

JOELLEN

Stop distracting yourself. Once you start playing you'll forget about all of that.

JAMES

Can't we do this in your car? At least its in the garage.

JOELLEN

I don't have a car.

JAMES

Then what's in your garage?

JOELLEN

Who. Cares. Pluck a string.

James plucks a low E (bottom string).

JAMES

There. Why don't you have a car?

JOELLEN

Cause I don't need one. Pluck another string.

James plucks the A string (5th string).

JAMES

Is this working for you?

JOELLEN

Is it working for you? Pluck another string.

James plucks another string.

JAMES

I'm just plucking strings.

James runs his fingers aggressively on the strings.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Anyone can do that. I'm not playing music.

JOELLEN

Play something I know.

JAMES

What do you know?

JOELLEN

Something popular.

James thinks for a moment. He begins to play a familiar Beatles tune for about 4-5 seconds.

JOELLEN

Stop! How can you play that without hesitation?

JAMES

I don't care about the Beatles song.

JOELLEN

You only care about your songs. They expose who you are! The Beatles don't know who you are. And you don't want to waste your time playing someone else's music.

JAMES

But I can play in front of Laura and Sam...

JOELLEN

They know you, James. Inside and out. You don't need to play your music for me, but I'm starting to know who you are.

JAMES

And I don't know much about you.

JOELLEN

You don't drive all the way over here to hear about me.

JAMES

I have questions.

JOELLEN

I'm sure you do. And I have answers. But you and I - We're here for you. Let's focus on that, okay?

JAMES

Okay. (beat) But can we do that inside?

JOELLEN

Yeah, I'm burning up.

JAMES

Thank God.

They quickly exit the car.

EXT. SAM'S RENTAL HOME - SAME DAY

James parks the car in Sam's driveway. He gets out of the car, tosses the keys up and catches them. Miranda's car is gone. James approaches the door and puts in the key.

James

(Loudly)

Sam, are you here, or working?

He knocks on the door. No answer. He turns the key and enters.

James

(Loud)

Hello-elo-elo-elo?

James opens Sam's fridge.

James

He won't miss this.

James grabs a bottle of water. He takes out his cellphone and calls his brother. He hears the cellphone ring in the other room. He looks up at the door to Sam's room.

James

You better not be skipping work.

James pushes open the bedroom door. The cellphone continues to ring. Sam is laying on his mattress, face-down, with a sheet covering him from his lower back to the back of his knees.

James

You're suppose to be at work.

James ends the call and takes a drink as he watches his brother lie there. As he removes his lips from the bottle, he realizes he's not moving at all.

James

Sam?

James takes a slow step forward, then suddenly recognizes the situation and rushes to Sam, dropping the water bottle in the process.

James

SAM!

James kneels down and flips Sam over. James knows he's been gone for a while. He lifts his neck up to give him a hug, then pulls away to look at his face.

James

Sam... Please, no, Sam.

James buries his head onto Sam. Nearby there are pills by his sobriety coin. Que the music.

EXT. Outdoor funeral - DAY

The music is "A Song For John".

A small group of well dressed friends and family are walking away from an even smaller group of people who remain at Sam's grave. As Miranda walks away with that group, James gives her a stone faced look. She looks like she fell hard off the wagon. JoEllen and Laura walk a small distance away with the group, then turn around to see James with a woman in the distance. Only the two of them remain at the grave.

JoEllen

Who is James with over there?

LAURA

That's his mother.

James turns to the woman.

James

(sign language)

[I love you. I've missed you.]

JoEllen

She's deaf.

LAURA

Yeah. From the accident.

Beat.

LAURA

For years, no one could change James. I'd support him if he chose to horde his music or if he let it out. But I'm glad he's finally seeing options. Thank you for talking to him.

JOELLEN

It's my pleasure.

LAURA

What do you get out of this?

JOELLEN

I know it seems strange to you, Laura, but there are a lot of people who need someone to talk to. Some people can't afford it. If everyone in my position stepped up and took in one person each...

LAURA

I know, I know. It's a bad time and I didn't mean anything by it. I've just never heard of anyone doing that. I'm sorry.

JOELLEN

I'm no saint. But I know I'm helping someone.

Cut to James and his Mother hugging from JoEllen's point of view.

INT. JAMES' APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James is on the edge of his bed still wearing his suit. He is aggressively hammering out chords and singing with his eyes closed.

James

But you don't have to see what you did to me and everyone who ever knew you // We miss you so greatly. Hope you miss us too. I promise you, we'll never forget you.

While he plays, cut to Curt sitting against the other side of the wall calmly listening. James opens his eyes. Tears that were held within finally fall down his face.

INT. JAMES' APARTMENT - DAY

James sits quietly in his dark apartment. His phone rings and breaks the silence. He answers

James

I said I didn't want to come by this week.

JoEllen

(through phone)

I'm just checking on you. You know, that funeral was the first time I've left the house in years.

James

I don't know what you want me to say.

JoEllen

I'm just letting you know that I care. (beat) Can you do something for me?

James

What?

JoEllen

Come get your guitar.

INT. JOELLEN'S HOME - DAY

James is sitting at her table with the guitar leaning by the door. Both have coffee in front of them.

JAMES

I have more than one guitar.

JOELLEN

You son of a bitch.

Jo smiles to lighten the mood. Beat.

JAMES

So, how long is this session?

JOELLEN

This is just a friendly visit.

James grins and shakes his head.

JAMES

Are we friends?

JOELLEN

Why not?

JAMES

I don't know. You're my therapist.

JOELLEN

Am I? You don't pay me. We just chat like friends.

JAMES

The flyer didn't mention you were looking for friends. Is that why you gave out free therapy? To find new friends? Social media too complicated for you?

JoEllen

I may not be your friend, but you are a friend to me. You can snap at me all day, but you'll discover that I'm a fucking rock.

James

But you have nothing to gain here! Who's in therapy here, me or you?

JOELLEN

Are you done?

Beat.

JAMES

You know what?

James get up from the table and grabs his guitar.

James

I might be.

He leaves.

EXT. SAM'S PLACE - DAY

James and Laura have been boxing up things at Sam's place all day long. James walks out of the front door and carries a box to formerly Sam's car, which is now James's. He looks past the car and sees Miranda's car approaching the house. She parks her car next to his, then steps out.

MIRANDA

Hey. James, right?

James

Why are you here?

MIRANDA

I didn't get a chance to talk to you at the funeral. I'm really sorry...

James

Yeah, you are.

He pushes the box further into the car. Miranda comes around Sam's car, but still keeping a bit a distance.

MIRANDA

Hey, I really am. He was so sweet to me. I never meet sweet guys.

James gives the box one last frustrated push, then stands aggressively, pointing at her.

James

I should have told him to stay the hell away from you. I should have known he wasn't strong enough.

MIRANDA

I don't want to get into it. I'm just here to pick up my CDs.

James

You killed him and all you can think about are your fucking CDs... I know to you that you were just getting your fix - getting high with him. But what you didn't know is that he's been through that for years. His body couldn't take anymore.

MIRANDA

Its not like I planned any of this. We were just partying. I didn't know...

James

He was so delicate. He would have done whatever you asked of him just to keep you near.

Laura walks out to see the commotion.

James (CONT'D)

I wish there was something I could do to you. But there is nothing in this world that will prepare you for the guilt you'll be feeling. I mean, you should feel it, but maybe you've lost your humanity. (beat) Maybe you don't feel the same things normal people feel. (beat) Maybe you lost that a long time ago.

MIRANDA

You don't know me...

James

Look at you. You're nothing. There's no one to know.

James closes the car door and begins the walk back to the house. Miranda is ashamed.

MIRANDA

What about my CDs?

James walks into the house and Laura follows.

INT. SAM'S PLACE - DAY

James sits in Sam's chair while Laura is cleaning up.

JAMES

I'm just gonna give everything away.

LAURA

To who?

JAMES

I don't care. I don't want any of this.

James gets up from the chair and begins cleaning off the table.

LAURA

You're keeping the car.

He stops cleaning.

JAMES

I don't want the car.

LAURA

I'm not gonna be your chauffer now. You're keeping the car. We'll sell everything else.

JAMES

Fine. Just let people offer whatever.

LAURA

Okay.

James resumes cleaning. He finds Sam's chip under the mess. He looks at it for a moment, then throws it away.

EXT. SAM'S APARTMENT - Evening

James carries another box to the trash and tosses it in. Laura follows with another box.

LAURA

Hold it open.

James holds the trash open as she tosses in her box. He closes it. While close, she hugs James and holds his head in her shoulder.

EXT. SAM'S APARTMENT - SAME EVENING

Laura and Sam are both sitting on the hood of Sam's car.

LAURA

What do you want to do now?

JAMES

I'll just head home.

LAURA

Its not late.

JAMES

It's not that.

LAURA

Don't shut down on me. (beat) Let's be together right now.

James nods while his head hangs low.

JAMES

What do you want to do?

LAURA

Let's walk.

EXT. CITY STREETS - SAME NIGHT

Laura and James are walking along the sidewalk downtown. A few montage shots gradually showing her getting James to smile again.

EXT. OUTDOOR EATERY - SAME NIGHT

Laura and James and sitting at an outdoor table (Something like North Street)

LAURA

Let's move away from here.

JAMES

I'm in.

LAURA

I've narrowed down to two options: San Francisco or New Orleans.

JAMES

New Orleans isn't far.

LAURA

I applied there in case you didn't want to move far away.

JAMES

Why San Francisco?

LAURA

I'm a closet Full House fanatic. TGIF.

JAMES

TGIF was about Family Matters. That was the highlight.

LAURA

Jalell White over John Stamos? "Do the Erkel" over Jesse and the Rippers?

JAMES

Yes. All of those things: Yes.

LAURA

"Did I do that?" over "You're in big trouble mister!"?

JAMES

You're only helping my case.

It all builds up to a laugh.

LAURA

It's far away. It's a beautiful city. There's so much culture. I think we'll love it there.

JAMES

I think we will. There's been so much changing. I need a good change for once.

LAURA

The hospital is one of the best in the country. There are people I've read about in books that work there. It's like working with your idols.

James seems distracted.

JAMES

What time is it?

LAURA

Past 10.

JAMES

Oh.

LAURA

Why?

JAMES

Curt's band is playing a few blocks away.

LAURA

Do you want to go?

JAMES

Nah.

LAURA

We should be supportive. You're kinda supporting yourself by going. Let's find out what he's done with everything.

JAMES

I am curious. It's a Tuesday, so what if no one's there? And the staff starts booing him. They're essentially booing me.

LAURA

No one's booing anyone.

JAMES

You think I could get in for free?

ext. SPANish moon - same night

Just outside of the moon, Laura and James wait in a short line. The sound is blasting inside.

JAMES

That's doesn't sound like any of my songs.

LAURA

Maybe its an opening act.

They approach the doorman.

DOORMAN

How many?

James

Two.

DOORMAN

Eighteen.

Almost sounds like a question.

James

I'm thirty.

DOORMAN

Nah, nine a piece to get in. Eighteen bucks.

James

I'm James Chelere. As in the band Chelere.

DOORMAN

Oh yeah?

James

Yeah.

DOORMAN

You're in the band?

James

No, but the band is named after me.

DOORMAN

Why is the band named after you?

James

I wrote the songs.

DOORMAN

Oh, alright, good for you. Eighteen bucks.

A short face off. A frustrated Laura reaches into the purse and pays.

LAURA

Here's a twenty.

DOORMAN

Alright, I'll need to see ID.

This earns another ugly look from James.

INT. SPANISH MOON - SAME NIGHT

The crowd is alive here in the moon. Curt and the band are dominating the room. His song is barely recognizable, but it is his song. James and Laura can't believe the crowd that is here. Its packed. Curt sees James in the crowd and points at him.

CURT

Chelere!

The crowd roars for the band. No one looks at James despite Curt points directly at him. The music fades and numbs within James' head. A direct shot of James' face as he looks around and finally up to Curt. Envy. Sadness.

INT. SPANISH MOON - Later that same night

The crowd has dispersed aside from a few groupies standing near the stage talking to Curt and the band. James and Laura are standing at the bar. This has become a drinking night for James. A man, GABE LARSON, approaches wearing casual attire, but everything about him is sharp and clean. James remains sober enough for regular conversation, though this drunk state is showing gradually more and more.

GABE

Hey, sorry to interrupt - James: Hi, I'm Gabe Larson.

Gabe holds out his hand.

James

You're the only one that saw me.

Laura shakes Gabe's hand.

LAURA

I'm Laura.

GABE

A pleasure. James, I was wrong about you. Your voice exists in your songwriting.

James

So, are you just stopping by to say hi?

GABE

Sure. And I'm a fan of you and the band.

James

You don't fit the demographic.

GABE

I'm here to take them to the next level.

Gabe hands James his card. James takes another drink then looks at the card. It's an agent's card.

James

You want to sign that band?

GABE

They're talented and intelligent - two things very hard to find. They're not in it for the booze and the loose women. This energy you're feeling - that will translate globally.

Gabe hands James a local magazine. "Who's who in Baton Rouge. Featuring the next best musicians, artists and writers." James holds on to it after seeing the cover page.

GABE (CONT'D)

I picked this up at the front door. This is just one example of the buzz they're getting.

James

But they're a cover band.

GABE

Not to these people. You and I know its a cover band, but everyone else doesn't.

Curt approaches the conversation.

James

They're playing my music though.

GABE

And that's why we need you on board.

Gabe shakes Curt's hand with excitement.

GABE

Hey Curt, marvelous!

LAURA

Great show, Curt.

CURT

Thank you, thank you. (to James) This is the guy that makes it all possible.

Curt puts his arm around James, but James violently shakes it off. The alcohol is more apparent now. James stands up and gets two arms distance between himself and the group.

James

You never told me the band was this big - This popular.

CURT

What?

LAURA

James, calm down.

GABE

James - this is good for everyone. This is gonna to change your life.

James

Curt, what are you doing to me?

CURT

What do you mean?

James

We never discussed all of this!

GABE

Look, how about we all sit down and...

James

No, Mr. Larson, I'm not sitting down and I'm not ready to talk to you. Those are my words you're... massacring up there.

CURT

The words are yours, James. Nothing's changed.

James

My words. (shouting) I SHOULD BE SAYING MY OWN WORDS UP THERE! Not you. ME!

James points at Curt.

James (CONT'D)

You're not allowed... No, I forbid you to sing any of that again.

LAURA

James, stop!

Laura approaches James. As she does, he back away from her, turns around and heads out. Laura follows.

CURT

James, come on!

INT. James'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James sits in his apartment. It's dark, except for a light on the Who's who magazine he's reading. He reads the article about Curt's band, Chelere. Highlight a few sentences:

"Bad name, good band"

"No one in the band is named James Chelere"

"Music like this is what the world has been waiting for"

That kind of stuff. James, frustrated, flips through the book in anger. The pages fall onto a local writer named JoEllen Foster. Her next book, "You're not crazy. Everyone around you is" is due next year. "Moved to Baton Rouge and stayed for the people" "The people turned out to be the perfect writing inspiration".

EXT. JoEllen'S HOME - DAY

James knocks aggressively on the door. JoEllen answers. James is holding the magazine up with her article exposed. She takes a moment.

JOELLEN

Do you want me to sign it?

JAMES

What the fuck is this...

JOELLEN

That is a bad picture of me.

James is not in the mood for jokes.

JOELLEN (CONT'D)

I suppose you could come in then.

James walks past her and gives her the magazine.

INT. JOELLEN'S HOME - DAY

James comes in; stops; sighs. Various blocking here.

JOELLEN

Oh look, I'm a "who's who".

James

Why did you lie to me?

JoEllen

Lie about what?

James

Being a therapist.

JoEllen

Oh that. Well, its because I'm an author. Didn't you read the article?

James, feeling fragile, looks to and from at his hands and JoEllen while he talks.

James

I trusted you with a lot of information about me, Jo. I thought we were friends.

JoEllen

Oh! Friends now, huh? When you first walked in that door, we weren't anything. I didn't know what we'd end up being. I've never claimed to be a therapist. I was careful to make sure I never called myself a therapist. You are one of the few people that I have really gotten to help, and helping you has been a pleasure, James, it has, and our time will end up in my next book. The part you're forgetting is that your story could very well help someone. You got something valuable out of these sessions, so why do you feel betrayed?

James

You know everything about me.

JoEllen

I never use real names.

JAMES

What's your pen name?

JOELLEN

Karen Bridges.

JAMES

Sounds fake.

JOELLEN

It is fake. (beat) No one's ever discovered that I've written about them.

James

I just discovered it.

JoEllen

Well, I'm sorry you found out.

James walks across the room and puts a hand on the top of the piano to support himself.

James

I've been lied to so much lately. Between everything with Sam, and Curt... I just have nothing left for you.

James turns to JoEllen.

JoEllen

Did something happen?

James

Yeah... everything happened. (beat) Goodbye, Jo.

James heads for the exit.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF CURT'S PLACE - DAY

James is walking up to his own door, but hears an acoustic guitar going on in Curt's apartment. James approaches Curt's door and knocks. The guitar stops, then Curt answers and tries to speak.

James

No, let me stay a few things. First off: Sorry I acted the way I did the other night. And also: Stop playing my music.

James nods, then walks away toward his apartment. Curt goes after him.

CURT

James, hold up. It doesn't have to be like this.

James

You're not even playing them right.

CURT

Ask yourself what part of this upsets you?

James turns around, but doesn't have an answer.

CURT (CONT'D)

This band is nothing without your music AND you. You're not gonna get left behind.

James

I just want to play my own music.

CURT

No one's stopping you from doing that.

James

I don't want anyone else playing them.

CURT

We're just a cover band. You're right.

James

You won't get signed without me.

CURT

I just want to make music.

James

Not my music.

James goes back to his own apartment and enters, leaving Curt behind.

INT. DAILY GRIND - NIGHT

James walks in with his guitar. Barry is behind the counter. He waves James over.

Barry

Hey James! Came back to us after making it big out there.

James is confused. He leans his guitar case against the counter.

BARRY (CONT'D)

I'd tell people when they talk about your band that, "Hey, that's that guy that always runs away from the mic!" I have a good laugh, but I'm proud of you. Good to hear you're doing it big. Screw the little guys, right?

Long beat.

JAMES

Fuck off, Barry.

James picks up his guitar case and walks out the door.

EXT. PARKING LOT OF THE DAILY GRIND - SAME NIGHT

James leans against Sam's car. He is on the verge of tears, but wards them off with anger and obscenities. Gabe comes by.

GABE

James.

James takes a deep breath and hides his emotions.

JAMES

Mr. Larson. Sorry about the other night.

GABE

You're not the first potential drunk client I've dealt with. I need you to understand what I'm trying to do here.

JAMES

I know what you're trying to do.

GABE

Oh? Enlighten me.

JAMES

You want to take my life's work and reduce it to radio fodder. Before that, you'll tell me I'll be paid the same amount as all beginners get paid. That'll cover rent for a few months and I will have paid for your new house in Malibu.

GABE

I'm not buying a house in Malibu. I hate the beach.

James rolls his eyes.

GABE (CONT'D)

Now, here's the part where you hear me out. I want to sign you.

JAMES

You've never heard me.

GABE

I've heard the music. So I want to sign you as a songwriter.

JAMES

That's more of the same.

GABE

I assure you its not. My team is bringing in a state of the art recording studio in the near future. We want this city to be the new haven for recording artists.

James

A haven, huh?

GABE

We're going to have everything in one place. You're going to be the one working with music artists from all over the world. It isn't a secret that you have talent. Curt believes in you, and no matter how much you push him away, he won't let me push you out. You hold all the cards.

James

When is all of this happening?

GABE

You have a few months before we really push it forward. For you, sooner than that. Please talk to Curt about it.

Gabe turns, leaves. James leans on the car.

INT. BACK STAGE AT A VENUE - NIGHT

Curt and James are having a chat. The dull sound of a crowd can be heard. Between them, it's quiet. Awkward.

JAMES

This is all new to me.

CURT

Okay.

JAMES

Is he for real?

CURT

Yeah, he's for real. He's family with Mike - the guitar player. He's the real deal.

Beat.

JAMES

What are you gonna play tonight?

Curt sighs.

CURT

Is that why you came down here?

JAMES

No. I know the answer to that. You're not gonna stop just because I asked. No, the reason I came down here is because if Mr. Larson is the real deal, then I should do this.

CURT

You should.

JAMES

It's just paper on the walls. That's all it is.

Curt watches James work it out.

JAMES

I'm not you. Do I have charisma?

CURT

Sure you do...

James works it out. Blocking all around the room.

JAMES

No. The answer is no, Curt. You belong out there. I don't. That's okay. Yeah. That's okay. At least there's a place for me, right? I'm not just gonna be some guy with a dream, right? I get to write and work with talented people. No more delivering papers.

CURT

That's right.

JAMES

You know I was about to move to San Francisco? Instead, I can commute from New Orleans and everything will work out. You seem so calm. Why are you calm?

CURT

This is what I want. All of life's curveballs nearly derailed everything, but I knew if I kept at it, I could do this forever.

JAMES

Weren't you ever afraid you weren't gonna make it?

CURT

No.

JAMES

I guess that's another way were different.

CURT

You gotta believe in yourself. You've got power that you don't even know about. People say "its just a song"; you listen and its over. Next track. The fortunate ones are the people who've fallen on hard times, and they recognize the power of a song to pull them out of that tough spot. And that's why repeat buttons exist.

James laughs, smiles.

CURT (CONT'D)

When those people fall down, it'll be your words that pick them back up.

Curt gets up on the stage.

CURT (CONT'D)

If you ever doubt yourself, just read your own lyrics.

INT. JAMES' APARTMENT - NIGHT

James stands in front of his wall of music. He reads from the pages. Very short montage of reading leading to a final moment.

JAMES

All will be well. All will be well.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

James is sitting on a bench outside of the hospital exit. Laura exits.

LAURA

So you do know where I work!

JAMES

Of course.

LAURA

I don't know what to say. You must have something on your mind.

JAMES

I do. It's big news. BIG.

LAURA

What? Tell me!

JAMES

I have a new job.

LAURA

What are you talking about?

JAMES

I'm a writer. I mean, I'll be paid for it now. I'm a paid writer!

LAURA

That's great, but I have no idea what you're talking about. Who's paying you?

JAMES

I'm working with Mr. Larson. We're gonna turn this city into a music haven.

LAURA

A music haven...

JAMES

His words, not mine.

LAURA

But what about San Francisco?

JAMES

You could go to New Orleans.

LAURA

We agreed on San Francisco. I already accepted the job in San Francisco.

JAMES

When did that happen?

LAURA

When we said we were moving there.

JAMES

I have to be here. What's more important to you?

LAURA

What's more important to you?

JAMES

I can't believe this. This is a huge opportunity for me. You know that, right?

LAURA

And the same for me. (long beat) You should stay. Cause you'll be great at it. And I need to go. Cause if I make you come with me, or if you make me stay, one of us will have this huge regret tearing us apart. And I don't want that.

JAMES

What do you want to do?

LAURA

You know what I want to do. But I don't think it's what you want.

A long beat.

JAMES

You should go. People do long distance things, right?

LAURA

Sure they do.

They hug. Music begins and carries us into the montage.

BEGIN MONTAGE.

- EXT. LAURA'S APT: Laura driving away in a packed car. James watches her go.

- INT. JAMES' APT: James takes down his music sheets from the wall. We scan the lyric, "We just met and I knew it would last forever" and the title "Laura's Song". James says: "Not for sale". He stacks the music sheets on a nearby surface.

- INT. JAMES' APT: James calls Laura, but she is too busy to talk at work.

- INT. COFFEE SHOP: At open mic night. James watches an act. He smiles and is happy as a spectator.

- INT. JAMES' APT: James calls Laura and it goes to voicemail.

- INT. COFFEE SHOP: James applauds as the song ends.

END Montage. As the montage ends, the next line of dialogue goes over it.

ext. Temporary STUDIO - DAY

Gabe and James are relaxing outside at a table after a tour. The building behind them is modern enough, but it is really just a business office with rented out space.

GABE

So what did you think of the plans for the new studio?

James

The plans are good.

GABE

Damn right, the plans are good.

James

I'm not really a plans guy.

GABE

We're breaking ground next month. But you'll get started here right away working with Curt and a few other local talents. The big artists won't show up if the locals aren't any good.

James

Why should that matter?

GABE

Artists love culture. That's why cities like Austin and Nashville thrive. They all want to be a part of the fun. We're the splash that starts the wave.

James

And you think all of this is possible?

GABE

I do. I wouldn't be talking to you if I didn't.

James

I think this will be the start of a good thing... It has to be.

GABE

So let's get some papers signed and get you working.

INT. TEMP STUDIO OFFICE - SAME DAY

James is thumbing through legal papers. Gabe is scrolling through his phone. They sit with a desk between them.

James

This can't be right.

GABE

It's all the standard paperwork.

James

It says that I won't be credited as a writer.

GABE

You'll be a writer here. But no, you won't be credited in association with the artist.

James

What the hell is that about?

Gabe puts down the phone.

GABE

People need to know that the guy on stage wrote all of these songs. It makes great headlines when people associate the artists with the lyrics in the songs. You think Taylor Swift wrote every single one of those songs?

James

I should to be credited for my work!

GABE

There are people out there that would kill to get a job as a working writer. This is our standard deal. You're only in here because I promised Curt that I would get you in here.

James

I'm not signing this. He's not going to sign without me.

GABE

Curt signed his papers this morning. It doesn't matter now, but you've got talent. I'm not going to lie to

you about that. The truth is that there are thousands of other people with the same talent waiting for their shot. You seriously can't believe that you're unique...

James

I'm not going to be some nobody.

GABE

You make it sound so drab. We just need to give the written by credits to our artists. Behind closed doors, they know the truth - where the real talent is. And you'll get compensated heavily for it.

James

What about the band name? People will know I'm involved.

GABE

That name is terrible. Stage names exist for a reason. Real names suck. That'll all be changed and you'll be paid for it! Money like this jump starts lives. Down payments on a car, a house... You got plans to marry that girl?

James

Yeah.

GABE

Well now you can move on with those plans. I can't believe I have to talk you into this. Curt couldn't wait to sign.

James

You signed Curt, so do you really want me to keep writing for you or do you just want my songs for Curt?

GABE

I would like you to bring new things to the table, but if you only sold us your songs, then I'd be satisfied. Do you not want the job?

James

No, I want the job. But I want to keep my music my music.

GABE

Here's your options. Sign this paper here - which gives us your collection and we'll never see you again. Or, sign this paper back here, you can do this forever.

James thinks, shaking nervously.

James

I need to think about this.

GABE

Let's just get this done with.

James

Please, let me think about this. You're asking me to let someone else pretend to live parts of my past. Its not something I'm going to decide on in an afternoon.

GABE

Okay James. I'll give you til the end of the week. After that, I'll fly some broke, eager songwriter out from New York who doesn't mind trading some words for a paycheck.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

James is sitting at a table with his head buried in his arms. A woman approaches him and puts a hand on his shoulder.

JoEllen

I'm here to see James Chay-leer play, have you heard of him?

James turns to see JoEllen.

James

Second time leaving your house this year, is it?

JoEllen

I took an uber.

JoEllen sits down at the table.

JAMES

Why are you here?

JOELLEN

I'm trying to get out more. You're not the only one that needs a change.

JAMES

Okay, let's say we're friends.

JOELLEN

Okay.

JAMES

What is going on with you?

JOELLEN

What do you mean?

JAMES

The pictures, the shut in lifestyle... Is that something I can read about on the back flap?

JOELLEN

It's the result of living a life of regrets. I lived a wild one. After the fun was through, I was handing over a baby for adoption. Given my past, visitation wasn't an option. Later, I paid the lady at the adoption office for information. Her new mother is a model. A freaking model. Maybe she pushed my baby to do the same. I know it's a stretch, but it gives me hope.

JAMES

Why don't you write about that?

JOELLEN

I think you know why I don't write about that.

Beat.

JAMES

Maybe I'll write about that and we could be even.

JOELLEN

Best of luck to you.

JAMES

So why did you really come here?

JOELLEN

I went to your apartment first. I went by Sam's, but there was a "For Rent" sign there, so the next place was here.

JAMES

I could've have been at Laura's.

JOELLEN

I'll check there after I'm done here.

James nods.

JAMES

I wouldn't have been there. She's gone. Took a job in San Fran. We're still together, but not... together.

JOELLEN

How long has she been gone?

James

About a month. Maybe two.

JoEllen

So why aren't we discussing that?

James

I have an opportunity here. If I'm here, I can't be there. She wants me to succeed. And Sam would have wanted that too.

JoEllen

Not like this.

James

I'm not happy about it, but I know I'm good with words - not with a stage. It's the right thing to do.

JoEllen

You can do both. There will be many opportunities. You may have to wait a while, but they'll come.
(beat) Do you want to be happy or do you want to be right?

James

You can write your book. Just let people know what I chose.

James leaves the table and runs out of the front door. Barry and the crew watch him go.

JoEllen

(Shouting to James)

I didn't need your permission!

JoEllen is happy for him.

EXT. in James's car - same night

James jumps in the car. He pulls out his cellphone and makes a call.

James

Alright Mista' Gabe - I'm ready to deal.

INT. James'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James pulls down all of the art and papers and everything off the walls and puts them all into a plastic garbage bag. He picks up "Laura's Song" off a desk, then puts it back down.

James

Still not for sale.

INT. TEMP STUDIO - SAME NIGHT

James, bag in hand, walks down the hall of the temporary studio.

INT. TEMP STUDIO OFFICE - SAME NIGHT

James drops the bag on the table.

GABE

What's this?

James is energized!

James

It's my life in a bag! Every song I've ever written.

GABE

You don't have this on a flash drive?

James

Take it or leave it.

GABE

You're ready to sign?

James

Got the check?

Gabe pulls the check from a paper clip attached to the contracts. There is a post-it note on the contracts that says "James".

GABE

For your whole collection.

Gabe slides the papers forward along with the check.

GABE

(as James finishes signing)

We're gonna make some great music James...

James finishes signing, takes the check, and walks out immediately. Gabe stands up.

GABE

Hold up!

Gabe looks over the paper work.

GABE

(disappointed, not mad)

Ah, James. Damnit...

Gabe walks into the hallway and turns to see James leaving the building. Fade to black.

INT. BACKSTAGE AT a different OPEN MIC NIGHT BAR - NIGHT

It's dark backstage here. James looks at his phone. New voice mails. He listens. It's Gabe.

GABE

It's Gabe Larson. I still haven't heard from you. I understand you don't want the job, but I was hoping you'd reconsider because you got some really good stuff here. It's not my cup of tea, but Curt is on fire with it and...

James hangs up the phone.

James

(to himself)

They're all yours.

ANOTHER ANNOUNCER

(to James)

Okay, you're up. Just introduce yourself.

James takes a deep breath. He looks behind him at a lit up exit sign. A nod. He looks back to the stage.

James emerges through the curtain to a very light audience. Low volume applause. James takes a seat.

James

Hi.

Cut to Laura in the crowd. Smiling, so proud.

James

My name is James Chelere. I just moved to San Francisco. (beat) I like it here.

James takes a brief moment to see the new faces. Then, he leans slightly into the mic.

James

This is a new one.

END.

The song plays over credits - half screen credits, half picture. About 1 1/2 minutes.